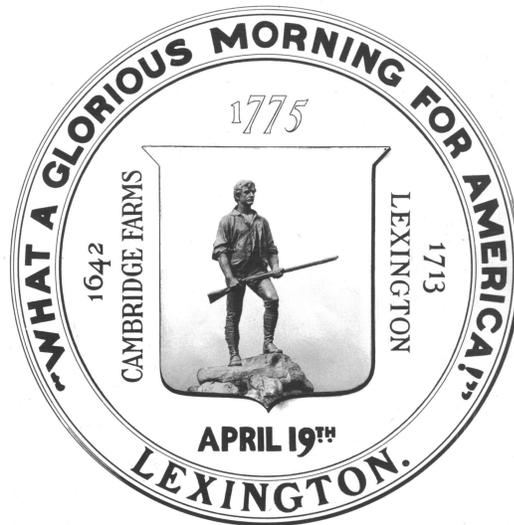


CAPITAL EXPENDITURES COMMITTEE

TOWN OF LEXINGTON



**SUPPLEMENT to the REPORTS TO THE
SPECIAL TOWN MEETINGS (STMs)
February 8, 2016 (2016-2), Released February 1, 2016,
&
April 25, 2016 (2016-4), Released April 20, 2016**

Released May 9, 2016

Submitted by:

Jill I. Hai, Chair

David G. Kanter, Vice-Chair & Clerk

Elizabeth DeMille Barnett

Rodney Cole

Wendy Manz

Warrant-Article Explanations and Recommendations

Cites of the “Town Warrant” refer to “TOWN WARRANT, Town of Lexington, Special Town Meeting 2016–2” and “TOWN WARRANT, Town of Lexington, Special Town Meeting 2016–4”, for Meeting dates of February 8, 2016, and April 25, 2016, respectively.

STM 2016-2

Article 2: Land Purchase— 20 Pelham Road	Fund Authorization Requested	Funding Source	Committee Recommends
	\$8,000,000	GF (Candidate for Debt-Exclusion Vote)	Approval (4–1)

“To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Selectmen to take by eminent domain, purchase or otherwise acquire, for municipal or school purposes, any fee, easement, or other interest in all or any part of land known as 20 Pelham Road and shown as lot 65A on Assessors’ Property Map 31, and to appropriate a sum of money therefor and for associated design, engineering and architectural services for plans and specifications and related costs in connection with said property; and determine whether the money shall be provided by the tax levy, by transfer from available funds, or by borrowing, or by any combination of these methods; or act in any other manner in relation thereto.”

“DESCRIPTION: This article requests authority and funding to purchase or take by eminent domain the property at 20 Pelham Road, owned by the Armenian Sisters and formerly used as an elementary school, to be used for municipal or school purposes.”

[Town Warrant for 2016–2]

History of Request

At the time of the initial report on this Article, this Committee’s recommendation was pending further public information being made available on this potential purchase.

At the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on April 25, 2016, it voted unanimously in Open Session to recommend approval of the purchase of this parcel of land and the above-cited appropriation to this STM and further information on the matter was subsequently made available.

Short Answer

The majority of the CEC supports acquisition of the 20 Pelham Road property (“Pelham”) even as the CEC realizes final plans for the property are not defined and the existing school is in need of significant renovation, because it preserves the Town’s ability to thoughtfully plan future growth for school and municipal needs, and provides flexibility in that long-term planning. There are numerous, acknowledged, needs facing Lexington and limited options for new space on which to locate them. While no decisions have been made at this time as to the specific use for this property, the Committee recognizes that waiting for the necessary studies, deliberations, and decisions would take longer than the property is likely to be available. As school enrollment continues to grow at greater than the median projected rate, preserving flexibility seems to be the prudent route. Expansion at our existing buildings is very expensive and limits what we can do in the future. As a “classroom for dollar” matter, it could be cheaper to build at Pelham than to expand at existing schools, according to the numbers we currently have for each.

Discussion

Pelham contains a 10-classroom elementary school, constructed in 1959, with a large gym, a full cafeteria, and a commercial kitchen. It is situated on 8.4 acres of land, adjacent on the east to Youville Place (a rehabilitation and nursing home), on the south to the Lexington Community Center (LexCC), on

the west to Conservation land, and on the north to Pelham Road—which has mostly single-family homes. It is located close to the center of Town, equal distant to the two most-significantly overcrowded elementary school districts. This Committee agrees that the pressing space needs of the School Department drive the Town’s consideration of this purchase. However, if it were ultimately to be determined that Pelham is not appropriate for school use, this report also identifies an opportunity to create senior/affordable housing.

This is a non-exhaustive, not prioritized, list of potential school and municipal uses:

- Lexington Children’s Place (LCP, the mandated Lexington Public Schools (LPS) pre-K program)

At 10 classrooms, the current building would fit the program requirements, but would require both hazardous-materials remediation and some renovation. That is estimated to cost between \$5 and \$10 million to make it ready for use in the short term; between \$10 and \$15 million to make it “20-year” caliber for long-term use. These estimates are based on the information from limited access and hazardous-materials testing that has already been done. Those results provide a preliminary estimate of \$750,000 for remediation, which is included in the above estimates. Until we have more complete access to the property, we will not know the exact nature of the remediation/renovations necessary.

The current lack of permanent space for LCP is in the existing Capital plan, requiring a near-term solution.

This could also allow the gym and cafeteria to be used by Recreation Department or Senior-Services programming from the adjacent LexCC.

This could also allow the facility to operate as an additional Lextended Day Program site, helping to reduce the current 175-student wait list for that programming. (That Program is not a LPS requirement; it is a fee-based, operating-revenue-neutral, program.)

This could provide space for other stand-alone programs within the LPS for which we do not currently have adequate space (e.g., the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO) Extended Learning Program (MELP) and the Lexington, Arlington, Burlington, Bedford, Belmont (LABBB) Collaborative for special-needs students).

An additional, low-usage, connecting roadway would be required from the LexCC to provide additional access, with an estimated cost of \$350,000 to \$400,000.

The preference of the School Committee has been to locate this program close to an existing elementary school for economies of facilities and staffing.

- Full-size, Elementary School

If school population continues to grow at the current rate, the Town will need more elementary space within the next several years. Initial work has been done to determine that a 24-classroom school could theoretically be sited on the property at a preliminary estimate of \$53 million to remove the existing building (recognizing it contains hazardous materials) and construct a new school. A full-scale, two-way road connecting to Marrett Road would be required to support this use and is estimated to cost an additional \$3 million. Additional work must be done (e.g., detailed consideration of soil analysis and wetlands on the site, among many other factors) to move this from theoretical to feasible.

This would provide full relief for current overcrowding and foreseeable enrollment growth. It also allows more flexibility for special-educational programs, LCP, and possibly middle school or high school as the grade assignments could be changed if necessary due to swing space needs, or growth. This Committee has previously reported that further elementary-school capacity increases were foreseeable even after the increases being provided by the currently approved additions, and a placekeeper has been included in this Committee’s Five-Year Capital Plan.

This could eliminate the need for a new LCP building if redistricting into this new school freed up sufficient spaces on the Harrington campus. This preserves flexibility at the Harrington campus for swing space or future growth.

- Relocation of Central Office. This would require more limited renovation/remediation and would free up old Harrington, allowing greater flexibility for use of the Harrington campus.

- Swing Space for Renovation/Expansion of School or Municipal Facilities. (Capital costs are not cited as they range significantly depending on what specific use is made of the space.)

- Senior/Affordable Housing

Even with substantial wetlands, Pelham contains enough space to accommodate up to 35 small, clustered, senior/affordable apartments, which would likely create less traffic and disruption than school uses. The Town has very few locations which would allow enough units, as this does, to qualify for State- and Federal-financing options, and few opportunities to make substantial progress in maintaining its affordable-housing inventory at 10% of existing housing—as calculated by the State—that provides the Town protections from Chapter 40B development that can avoid many zoning restrictions.

Proximate location to Town Center and the LexCC.

Partial preservation of the existing building might allow shared use of the gym and food-service areas.

Would require significant investment by the Town and an increase in operational efforts.

Conclusions

Purchase at this time preserves the opportunity to further evaluate the property and see which of the options (or others which may not be listed above) best suit the property and the Town's needs. The Town has considered a variety of other locations throughout the multi-year master-planning process (e.g., Laconia Street, Worthen Road—across from Lexington High School, Harrington Campus). These have been examined for a variety of school uses. While it is possible as yet unknown properties might become available in the future, Pelham is not likely to remain available. (See the Appropriation Committee's report to this STM 2016-2, released May 6, 2016, for additional information on this Article in its analysis and recommendation to Approve (7-1).)

Further exploration needs to be done regarding the feasibility of any of these, as well as of possible conservation land swaps to extend this parcel. The ability to do that work thoughtfully and thoroughly warrants action now to purchase the property; however, that must not diminish the importance of pursuing due diligence for both the property and the building prior to purchase.

While it is not this Committee's, or Town Meetings' preference to purchase first and "fit" to program later, the central location of this property, the myriad needs we face and the ability, if necessary, to sell off the property if it does not adequately fit a need within our plan, justify pursuing its acquisition at this time.

Minority Position

With asbestos and lead paint identified throughout the building, as well as PCB contamination in classroom areas, the opponent to this article is concerned that 1) property purchase will expose the Town to great risk/financial liability without costly remediation; and 2) remediation costs could be considerably higher than the estimates provided at \$1 to \$2 million. The opponent's larger concerns are: 1) lack of transparency and information made available to Town Meeting on this acquisition (recently released reports on contamination in the building were performed in September); 2) The taxpayer impact of this additional capital expense, considering a capital plan which already includes items such as: the new Hastings School; a new LHS heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system (estimated at \$13 million); Police and Fire Stations; etc.

STM 2016-4

<i>Article 5: PURCHASE OF BELMONT COUNTRY CLUB LAND</i>	Fund Authorization Requested	Funding Source	Committee Recommends
	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Indefinite Postponement (4-0)

“To see if the Town will vote to exercise the Town’s right of first refusal pursuant to G.L. c. 61B to purchase or otherwise acquire for municipal purposes a portion of the parcel of land shown as Lot 2A on Assessors’ Map 1 and owned by The Belmont Country Club, Inc.; appropriate a sum of money therefore and determine whether the money shall be provided by the tax levy, by transfer from available funds, including Community Preservation Act funds, by borrowing, or by any combination of these methods; or act in any other manner in relation thereto.”

“DESCRIPTION: The land referred to in this article is the subject of a purchase and sale agreement between the Belmont Country Club as owner and the Montessori school as purchaser. Because this parcel has received favorable property tax status, known as Chapter 61B, the Town has a right of first refusal to purchase it for the same amount negotiated by the Montessori School.”

[Town Warrant for 2016-4]

At the time of the initial report on this Article, this Committee’s recommendation was pending further public information being available on this potential purchase.

At the Board of Selectmen’s meeting on April 25, 2016, it voted unanimously in Open Session not to exercise that right to purchase this parcel of land.

This Committee endorses the decision not to purchase the land.

Note: Our Chair recused herself from deliberations on this matter as she is a member of that Club.